



Retelling: The Overlooked Skill

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Retelling is an important skill often overlooked in regular reading instruction. Students' retellings give teachers insight into their language levels, comprehension, vocabulary, and background knowledge. Retelling improves critical thinking skills and develops understanding of story structure. This presentation will explain a developmental approach to retelling. Using the ready-made vocabulary word banks in the Read and Tell™ series along with PixWriter™, you will find solutions to the problem of accessing age-appropriate literature, improving language skills, and increasing opportunities and skill-levels in written language.

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The skill of retelling is often overlooked during reading instruction. However, it is important, because retelling

- solidifies comprehension,
- connects information,
- improves critical thinking skills, and
- improves all areas of language.

Brown and Cambourne found all areas of language development improve when children tell about what they have read or heard read. In order for a child to retell a story, he must

- understand the story,
- make predictions and inferences, and
- relate the story to their own life experiences.

Retelling must be considered a written language exercise, even if it is done orally. In order for a child to completely retell a story, he must not assume the listener has information about the story. The retelling must be as complete as the written text in order to insure that the listeners can construct their own meaning of the story.

PixWriter™, from Slater Software, is a solution to assist young and struggling writers to have success with written language. Because the vocabulary buttons hold text paired with Literacy Support Pictures™, students, who may not have experienced success previously, can write. PixWriter allows students to circumvent their areas of inexperience or difficulties--spelling, organization, sound-symbol relationships, fine-motor control, physical limitations. Visual cues help students remember facts and events from the story. PixWriter also gives success to students who have experienced repeated failures in writing. Their confidence in written language ability is restored.

The Read and Tell™ series was developed for two reasons:

1. to help students access the regular education curriculum, respond to books, and improve comprehension skills.
2. to help the teacher by being a true time-saver.

Ready-made word banks allow more time to teach, read and reread books, and hold book talks. Paraprofessionals can open a word bank file when it is needed as they support students in the classroom.

PixWriter must be installed on your computer to use the Read and Tell products. Use the word banks as they have been designed, or adapt them to fit the ability levels and goals for your students. Either way, you have saved time preparing your lesson. The program is written for both Macintosh and Windows computers.

We chose the books to include in the Read and Tell Series by:

- looking at curriculum guides from around the country,
- finding teacher and student recommended book lists,
- choosing Newbery Award winners,
- talking with educators, and
- our own personal experience.

The selected books are multicultural and include historical fiction, nonfiction, and classics. Nontraditional families, survival, friendships, fantasy--are some of the themes that are present in the books.

Read and Tell™--Primary contains at least one PixWriter word bank for each book. (There are a total of 160 word banks for 100 books.)

Students write to:

- retell;
- sequence;
- identify character, plot, setting, problem and solution;
- learn beginning, middle, and end; as well as
- write about their personal experiences and
- favorite parts of the book.

Read and Tell--Intermediate and Teen have more than PixWriter word banks. Because the books are longer and contain more complex vocabulary, chapter summaries are included. The summaries are in both print and picture-assisted text. The files were created in Picture It and are ready-to-print PDF format. After reading the chapter summaries, students retell each chapter using the ready-made PixWriter word banks. They answer Comprehension Questions which serve as quizzes. Most of the questions are in multiple-choice format, but some questions require a PixWriter word bank. When rewriting the chapters, the vocabulary was simplified, but many of the age-appropriate words were kept. Therefore, vocabulary files are included. Use the flashcards for use in drills and vocabulary games. In addition there is a file that contains the word, the word used in a sentence that relates to the book, and the definition of the word.

Retellings can be written by the student with special needs using the word banks and with teacher support as needed. Students can have their own copies of the adapted chapters/books and can take and hand in quizzes. They can answer higher-level questions using PixWriter.

Examples of some of the questions within the comprehension sections follow. The student is asked to:

- explain (Why didn't Maniac Magee go to school?),
- express an opinion (Do you want the man in the yellow suit to get the spring water?),
- draw inferences (The book told you what the war was like for everyone. Write what it was like for the soldiers?),
- compare and contrast (How is your family different from Jonas' family?),

- describe (What kind of man was Scrooge?),
- predict (What danger awaits the children in the building?), and
- relate the story to personal experiences (It was hard for the family to leave and decide what to take with them. What would be some important things you would take if you could find one small suitcase?).

You and your students can meet standards, work toward completion of goals and objectives, and have fun becoming absorbed in age-appropriate literature. The themes are sure to appeal to readers, and teachers appreciate the materials that are at-hand, easy to use, and adaptable for their classrooms.

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